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ABSTRACT

Intended for adult literacy tutors in Britain who teach West Indian students, this booklet provides information about the history of Caribbean Creole English and about the ways in which it differs from Standard English. The five chapters contain discussions of the Caribbean setting; the differences between Pidgin and Creole English; Caribbean Creole English, including its grammatical features, pronunciation patterns, implications for phonics instruction, and suggestions for teaching; student attitudes toward Caribbean Creole English; and ways of dealing directly with Creole English that do not offend West Indian students, including the use of cartoon strips and poetry and other literature written in that language. (FL)

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Caribbean English and Adult Literacy

Roxy Harris

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Introduction

Large numbers of students of West Indian origin are being taught in urban Adult Literacy Schemes in Britain. Most of the students concerned came to Britain from countries which have English as the official language. They themselves speak forms of Creole English which differ from Standard English in grammatical structure, sound system and vocabulary. This booklet aims to inform adult literacy tutors about these differences and to provide some guidance on the history of Caribbean Creole English so that tutors can approach this area of teaching with the necessary degree of sensitivity.

I do not claim to be an expert on Creole English. Nor do I attempt to deal comprehensively with the extremely complex linguistic situation in the Caribbean area. The Creole Language issue is highly controversial and intricate. Few statements can be made without qualification, and linguists offer detailed and often conflicting theories. I have attempted to produce a clear, simple and easily readable guide. The booklet contains some teaching ideas and suggestions but needs to be supplemented by extensive learning materials.

Throughout, I have used the term Standard English to signify "formal English" — the kind of English required for official purposes in Britain. I also refer to Creole English language and not to Creole dialect. Linguists find it difficult to define the difference between a language and a dialect. As far as Caribbean Creole English is concerned the most favoured idea is that of a "dialect continuum". This suggests that for instance in Jamaica, the highly educated classes use a Jamaican Standard English which is quite close to Standard English. At the other end of the spectrum is a full Jamaican Creole English which the Standard Jamaican speaker would find it difficult to understand. Only small numbers of people in the society speak either Standard Jamaican English or the full Jamaican Creole

English. The majority of the population speak forms of Creole English varying in degree along a continuum between the two extremes. In this situation the different Creole forms can be said to be dialects of the Standard Jamaican English. The term dialect carries connotations of inferiority when the dialect is compared with the Standard since it is the educated classes who speak the Standard. I refer to "Creole language" rather than to "Creole dialect" because I want to make it clear for tutors that Standard English and Creole English are not superior/inferior versions of the same language, but are in fact different language systems.

Chapter One
The Caribbean Setting

Take a look at the map. It covers an area which most British people know as the West Indies. The term "West Indies" came from the Spanish explorers who used it to describe the countries which they reached by sailing West from Europe. They called these countries the West Indies to distinguish them from the East Indies which the Portugese reached by sailing East.

But the map shows us that the nearest country to Jamaica is Cuba which is only about 90 miles away. Yet most people in Britain do not envisage Cuba as being part of the West Indies. The same applies to Haiti and the Dominican Republic which are the next countries reached on the eastward journey from Jamaica. Let us look for a moment at some of the distances in the area:—

Jamaica to Cuba	90 miles
Jamaica to Haiti	130 miles
Jamaica to Puerto Rico	600 miles
Jamaica to Trinidad	1000 miles
Jamaica to Guyana	1400 miles
Jamaica to Barbados	1200 miles

It is clear then, that it is not physical proximity to each other which gives meaning to the words "West Indies" as applied to certain countries in the Caribbean area. The meaningful link between these countries arises from similarities in four respects:—

1. A shared experience of the slave trade between West Africa and the Caribbean.
2. A shared experience of plantation slave societies in the Caribbean.
3. All experienced British colonial rule.
4. They all have English as their official language.

Nowadays it is the English language which really allows us to link together a number of diverse and widely separated countries and to call them the West Indies. Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico are excluded because they are Spanish-speaking. Haiti, Guadeloupe and Martinique are French-speaking.

Here is a table listing most of the West Indian countries in the Caribbean whose official language is English. Most of the West Indian students in British Literacy Schemes come from one or other of these countries.

Country	*Population*	*Year of Independence*
Jamaica	2,084,250	1962
Trinidad & Tobago	1,200,000	1962
Guyana	714,233	1966
Barbados	247,300	1966
Grenada	107,779	1974
St Lucia	114,000	1979
St. Vincent	109,743	—
Dominica	80,000	1978
Antigua	70,000	—
St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla	51,957	—
Montserrat	12,162	—
Belize	150,000	—

Although the official language of the countries listed above is English the language used by the mass of the people is Caribbean Creole English. This is true except for Dominica and St Lucia where people speak a French creole, although the structures of the French and English creoles are very similar. Each of the West Indian countries has its own distinctive form of Creole English.* Nevertheless, they share many common features, which we will examine later.

*The total language pattern in these countries is of course much more complex than indicated here. For example both Trinidad and Guyana have very large Indian populations so that languages such as Hindi and Urdu are widely spoken. French Creole is still spoken by some people in Grenada and Trinidad. Other minority languages exist in many West Indian countries.

Chapter Two
Pidgin English and Creole English

Many literacy tutors in Britain will be surprised and confused at the statement that Caribbean Creole English is a language and not merely broken English, simple English, bad English or Pidgin English.

1. What is a Pidgin Language?

There is no agreement as to the origin of the word "pidgin" although one suggestion is that it is derived from a Chinese corruption of the word "business". There are too many theories and interpretations about pidgins to go into here; but from the mass of available evidence it is possible to draw some conclusions:—

- ☐ A pidgin arises when groups of people who do not speak each others' languages are thrown together and have a pressing need to communicate with each other.
- ☐ Pidgins have tended to occur under the pressure to trade or do business.
- ☐ Pidgins are severely limited in their range and tend to be restricted to use in specialised transactions.
- ☐ Pidgins are no-one's first language.

2. What is a Creole Language?

No single, agreed definition exists for the word "creole". Websters Third New International Dictionary offers the following definitions:—

> *"slave born in his master's house; negro born in the colonies; white person born in the colonies; slave brought up in his master's house; one of native birth, but European descent."*

According to the Oxford English Dictionary creole means "native to the country or locality". Finally, Frederic Cassidy the author of Jamaica Talk, a standard work on Jamaican Creole English, has tentatively defined creole as meaning "island born". These definitions overlap and are useful as generalisations. It is also possible to make one or two generalisations about creole language:—

- A creole develops from a pidgin when the speakers of the pidgin are in prolonged contact with each other. The range of the pidgin is too restrictive to allow its speakers to communicate fully in every area of their lives. As a result, the vocabulary and grammatical structure of the pidgin have to be extended. When the language is capable of representing the full range of human expression, it can become a creole.

- A creole language exists when a pidgin develops into the mother tongue or first language of a sizeable part of a community.

How then did Pidgin English develop in West Africa leading later to the creation of the varieties of Caribbean Creole English which are with us today? The following quotations help to establish the general historical background to the development of these forms of language.

> *"Their (pidgins and creoles) very existence is largely due to the processes — discovery, exploration, trade, conquest, slavery, migration, colonialism, nationalism — that have brought the peoples of Europe and the peoples of the rest of* ***the world to share a common destiny.***"
>
> (PIDGINISATION AND CREOLISATION OF LANGUAGES. P.5. Dell Hymes — Ed)

> *"Caribbean social history has been a history of colonialism, massive immigrations, plantations and the extensive use of slave and contract labor . . . The principal form of organisation, the plantation, involved the use of large masses of imported labor, under the control of small numbers of European masters."*
>
> (PIDGINISATION AND CREOLISATION OF LANGUAGES. P.483.)

The Development of Pidgin English

Linguists are split into separate, competing schools of thought, each offering its own elaborate explanation of the development of Pidgin English resulting from the contact between West Africans and Europeans beginning in the 16th century. It is useful, though, for us to list some of the possible circumstances in which Pidgin English may have come about.

West African Coast (Pre-Slavery)

- ☐ Pidgin language developed for communication between ships' crew members of different nationalities.
- ☐ Pidgin language developed in the 15th century through the activities of Portugese travellers. English words gradually replaced the Portugese content of the pidgin's vocabulary as English travellers became more numerous.
- ☐ Pidgin English developed by English merchants and their customers.
- ☐ Pidgin English developed between Africans of different tribes who had come into contact with Europeans on the coast.

West African Factories and Settlements

- ☐ The slave traders organised factories and settlements on the West African coast where slaves were kept before being shipped to the Caribbean. Africans of different tribes, kept in these places, may have developed a Pidgin English.

Slave Ships

- ☐ Africans of different tribes were often mixed together on British slave ships sailing from West Africa to the Caribbean. This journey was a lengthy one and if Africans speaking different languages wished to communicate they would have had to develop a pidgin language. As they had borne the mutual experience of capture by English-speaking slave traders, the pidgin would have been Pidgin English.

- Pidgin English may also have developed during the interaction between European overseers and African slaves on the slave ships.

Caribbean Plantations

- Pidgin English developed amongst African slaves on the plantations because:—

"plantation owners deliberately acquired slaves with the greatest possible variety of languages in order to make native-language communication among slaves impossible and thus reduce the risk of insurrection."

(PIDGINISATION AND CREOLISATION OF LANGUAGES P.20)

The Development of Creole English

West African Coast

- The British slave traders had factories and settlements on the West African coast for so many years that the beginnings of Creole English may have developed among the Africans of different tribes who were not slaves but who lived and worked in the vicinity of the factories and settlements.

Caribbean Plantations

- Succeeding generations of children born of African slave parents on the Caribbean plantations needed to develop a common language which would meet all their linguistic requirements. In this way a Creole English native to each Caribbean country was developed out of the Pidgin English and African languages of their parents.
- White planters and their children learned Creole English from their slaves.
- Many white planters had sexual relationships with their African women slaves producing mulatto children who often became favourites. House slaves, also, were widespread. These circumstances must have been one source of the development of Creole English.

Colonial Society After Slavery

Creole English in colonial society was a low status language although it was spoken by most people. The white, brown, and black educated classes went out of their way to assert the unimportance and inferiority of Creole English when it was compared with the Standard English of the U.K. or the Standard English used by the highly educated minority of each West Indian country. The following statement about Trinidad, was true in colonial society throughout the English-speaking Caribbean:—

> *"Standard Trinidadian English has traditionally been an index of the speaker's educational achievement. And since education has led the way to social if not economic influence, ability to speak standard Trinidadian has become associated with social status. On the other hand, creole has long been identified with low social status and poor educational achievement."*
>
> (D. Winford — LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY, in CARIBBEAN ISSUES, December 1974).

After Independence

Several West Indian countries gained Independence during the 1960's. In the later years of colonial rule, and since Independence, many people in each country have worked to enhance the status of Creole English. Yet the majority of the population of the region have continued to see the relationship between Standard English and Creole English in terms of superiority/inferiority. (More of this later in the chapter on the attitude of West Indian literacy students towards Creole English).

Creole English language has been mentioned repeatedly so far. But what are its main features?

Chapter Three
Caribbean Creole English

Introduction

Each West Indian country has its own distinctive form of Creole English, and there is not the space here to describe them all. Moreover, apart from Jamaican Creole English, none of the other English Creoles of the Caribbean have yet been the subject of sustained and exhaustive academic study. This might seem to pose a problem for literacy tutors anxious to deal adequately with West Indian students who are Creole English speakers. However, the problem is less severe than it appears at first sight for two reasons:—

1. It is safe to say that the majority of West Indian adults in Literacy Schemes in Britain are of Jamaican origin. This assumption can be made after a look at the following table derived from the last census in 1971. It categorised, by country of birth, the number of West Indians in Britain.

Country of Birth	*Numbers in Britain*
Jamaica	171,755
Barbados	27,055
Trinidad & Tobago	17,135
Guyana	21,070
Others	67,035
Total	304,050

"Others" includes Antigua, Dominica, St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Grenada.

This total figure did not include those born in Britain of West Indian parents, but the make-up of the figures shows that Jamaicans in Britain vastly outnumber those from other West Indian countries.

2. In spite of the individuality of each form of Caribbean Creole English, it is possible to pinpoint certain features which they have in common.

Section 1.
Some Grammatical Features of Caribbean Creole English

(Each example draws attention to one point of grammatical difference between Caribbean Creole English (C.C.E.) and Standard English (S.E.).)

- ☐ Past Tense of verbs (irregular verbs).
  C.C.E. — "Yesterday I run for the bus"
  S.E. — "Yesterday I ran for the bus"

- ☐ Past Tense of verbs (-ed endings).
  C.C.E. — "The car stop at the lights"
  S.E. — "The car stopped at the lights"

- ☐ Auxiliary verbs: (have, had).
  C.C.E. — "We spend all the money"
  S.E. — "We have spent all the money"
  or "We had spent all the money"

- ☐ Auxiliary verbs (has, have).
  C.C.E. — "My friend have a brother"
  S.E. — "My friend has a brother"

- ☐ The verb "to be" (is, was).
  C.C.E. — "The baby tired"
  S.E. — "The baby is tired"

  C.C.E. — "The baby cry/crying at night"
  S.E. — "The baby was crying at night"

- ☐ Subject and verb in the Present Tense (3rd Person Singular.)
  C.C.E. — "That child always cause trouble"
  S.E. — "That child always causes trouble"

- Passives.
  - C.C.E. — "The food finish"
  - S E. — "The food is finished"

- The use of "is"
  - C.C.E. — "Is five o'clock"
  - S.E. — "It is five o'clock"

- Pronouns.
  - C.C.E. — "Me tell the man"
  - S.E. — "I told the man"
  - C.C.E. — "The man tell she" (especially in countries other than Jamaica).
  - S.E. — "The man told her"
  - C.C.E. — "Him tell the woman everything" (especially Jamaica).
  - S.E. — "He/She told the woman everything"

- Possessives.
  - C.C.E. — "George lose him coat" (especially Jamaica).
  - S.E. — "George lost his/her coat"
  - C.C.E. — "George lose he/she coat" (especially other than Jamaica).
  - S.E. — "George lost his/her coat"
  - C.C.E. — "She read the girl letter"
  - S.E. — "She read the girl's letter"

- Plurals.
  - C.C.E. — "Give me four bottle"
  - S.E. — "Give me four bottles"

- Questions.
  - C.C.E. — "When it start?"
  - S.E. — "When does it start?"
  - C.C.E. — "What the time is?"
  - S.E. — "What is the time?"

Teaching Points

a) The examples above are not intended to be representations of Creole English speech. They are intended to illustrate the kind of *written* sentences, featuring Creole English grammatical structure, which many West Indian adult literacy students often produce. Most of the sentences above are deliberately framed to contain *only one* grammatical point of difference between Caribbean Creole English and Standard English. In reality students often produce a sentence containing several points of difference. Hopefully, the approach taken in the examples given earlier makes it much easier for a literacy tutor to be clear about exactly what the grammatical differences are.

b) It should be evident from these examples, which are by no means comprehensive, that when West Indian adult literacy students produce such written sentences they are not merely "making mistakes", "being forgetful" or "being careless". The truth is that they are reflecting in their writing the fact that Creole English is a language system with rules. It is not "broken English" or "bad English". Writing about the outsider who finds Jamaican Creole English difficult to grasp, Cassidy remarked—

> *"the rules are different (from English), but he may be assured that there* **are** *rules."*
>
> (Frederic G. Cassidy: JAMAICA TALK P.8)

Students who regularly produce Creole English grammatical structures in their writing, need tuition and practice in writing the equivalent Standard English structures. Tuition should take place with the clear understanding that the tutor's job is to help the student to write Standard English structures which are different from their Creole English alternatives but **not** superior to them.

c) West Indian adults come to literacy schemes to acquire accurate writing and spelling using Standard English conventions, but their efforts are hampered in one important respect. Creole English takes much of its vocabu-

lary from English and as a result many Creole speaking students have the sensation of knowing Standard English without being clear about what the precise differences are between Standard English and Creole English. Writing, for these students, involves a constant mental struggle to keep the two systems distinct.

d) After studying the grammatical differences listed earlier in this chapter, literacy tutors can respond in a variety of ways.

(i) At one level, an increased understanding of Creole English simply enables the tutor to be more aware of the hidden factors at work when creole-speaking students attempt to reproduce Standard English sentence structures in their writing.

(ii) The tutor, without discussing Creole English with the students concerned, can study their written work and identify which Standard English structures they find difficult. Concentrating on one area of difficulty at a time, the tutor can then use familiar literacy teaching techniques to give the students opportunities to write the difficult structures repeatedly and in many different contexts.

e.g. *CASE 1.*

The student's written work shows that he finds the "has/have" distinction in Standard English difficult to reproduce.

One possible approach is for the tutor to design relevant sentence completition exercises. First the student could be given models of the kinds of response he is expected to write. The student could be given:—

I have a big family.
You have a lot of money.
He has big feet.
She has my records.
We have too much to do.
They have a long way to go.

then the student might be asked to complete sentences such as:—

I ..... brown eyes (has/have)

You .....done well. (has/have)

He .....it. (has/have)

She.....a new house. (has/have)

We..... no milk. (has/have)

They .....two drinks. (has/have)

e.g. *CASE 2.*

The student finds it difficult to write using Standard English verb past tenses.

The tutor could construct a series of questions which would compel the student to write repeatedly the Standard English past tense verb forms in order to answer the questions.

e.g. a student could be asked to write answers in response to:—

"What time did you get to work today?"
"Where did you go at the weekend?"

These teaching examples are merely indicators and obviously many other, more imaginative, exercises can be devised to facilitate practice of Standard English structures. However, from them three important points emerge:—

- ☐ The structures must be practised in a meaningful context such as a sentence and not in isolation.
- ☐ Many students need to be provided with a model of the kinds of response that they are being expected to reproduce. Remember we are assuming that these students are practising structures which they do not know well and not simply refreshing their memories on structures that they have temporarily forgotten.

- ☐ A student cannot be expected to feel comfortable with unfamiliar grammatical structures after writing them only once or twice. They must be practised repeatedly and returned to frequently.

(iii) Where the tutor-student relationship is well established and both parties are confident enough, the tutor can first talk explicitly to the student about the contrast between Creole English and Standard English, then illustrate the differences using selected parts of the student's own writing. With this preparation the student will be more able to grasp what he is being asked to practise, and why.

(iv) Sometimes, the student is a good reader, can write reasonably well, and has had the opportunity to discuss Creole English and its relationship to Standard English. If this is so, he or she can be given a chance to read books written by West Indian authors which contain examples of Caribbean Creole English. In some cases it may even be possible for such students to try creative writing using Creole English themselves. (for fuller discussion on this see Chapter 5).

Just as Creole English grammatical patterns are relevant to the student's general writing in Standard English, so there are Creole English pronunciation patterns which may have some bearing on spelling and meaning when the student writes.

Section 2.
Some Creole English Pronunciation Patterns

☐ "th" pronounced as "t"

"thick" pronounced — "tick"
"three" pronounced — "tree"
"thing" pronounced — "ting"

☐ Voiced "th" pronounced as "d"

"them" pronounced — "dem"
"that" pronounced — "dat"
"there" pronounced — "dere" or "dear"

- Addition of initial "h"

  "is" pronounced — "his"
  "angry" pronounced — "hangry"

- Initial "h" not pronounced

  "hot" pronounced — "ot" or "at"

- Final consonant not pronounced

  "first" pronounced — "firs"
  "bend" pronounced — "ben"

- Vowel Pronunciation

  "pocket" pronounced — "packet"

  "want" pronounced — "waan"
  "draw" pronounced — "draa"

  "cat" pronounced — "cyat'

Often, Creole English uses a similar pronunciation for pairs of words which have different meanings and are spelt differently.

Here are some examples:—

Word Pairs (Similar Pronunciation by some Creole Speakers)

bus — boss
cut — cot
luck — lock
here — hair
steer — stare/stair
cheer — chair
pier — pear/pair
ear — air
fear — fair/fare
beer — bare/bear

phoned — found
hole — howl

coal — cold
goal — gold
while — wild
mile — mild

far — four
card — cord
star — store
thin — tin
thigh — tie
through — true
with — wit
faith — fate
death — debt
both — boat
tooth — toot
fourth — fort/fought

soul/sole — sold
fine — find
mine — mind
wine — wind
win — wind

Of course there are many other examples and no doubt tutors will come across them in the course of teaching their students.

Teaching Points

a) The first extremely important point that must be made concerning this whole section on Creole Pronunciation patterns is that:—

A tutor should in no way attempt to change the way a student speaks.

b) Even if it was desirable to attempt this, **(and it isn't),** it would not work. Most of the West Indian adults in literacy schemes in Britain have the experience of going to school in

colonial society in the West Indies when attempts were made to change their speech:—

"The local West Indian speech was never accepted by schools in their conventional normative function; in polite society, on all formal occasions, in the law courts, and in the Church, one must speak English. This, two decades ago, was justification enough for a teacher to punish his pupils for using vernacular speech in the school yard — creole in Jamaica, patois in St. Lucia for instance."

(Foreword by R. N. Murrary — in Dennis Craig — AN EXPERIMENT IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE CARIBBEAN).

"It is a long-standing practice in many places for children who do not "talk proper", or who "talk bad", to be scolded into producing a "better" kind of speech . . . I have had experience of this in Guyana and have witnessed such scolding in Jamaica, St. Vincent, Grenada and Trinidad."

(Dennis Craig in PIDGINISATION AND CREOLISATION OF LANGUAGES.)

c) Any literacy tutors who tried to change their student's speech would also be making the gross assumption that the way they themselves pronounced words was somehow "correct", and the student's way "incorrect".

d) It is true that some West Indian students attempt to define their literacy problem by saying "I can spell but I don't know how to pronounce". Nevertheless, the task of tutors is to help students to achieve proficiency in **written** Standard English. Any ambiguity due to pronunciation can be clarified by setting the words concerned in context. Take a word pair mentioned earlier "here/hair". By repeatedly completing sentences such as:—

"I use a comb to do my..... (here/hair)

the student will learn to relate a particular spelling pattern to a particular type of context. If someone asked us to write down the word "taught" we would have to be given a context before knowing whether to write "taught", "taut", or "tort".

e) At the same time no one would suggest that the B.B.C. announcer who pronounces "off" as "orf" or "awf", cannot spell the word or that he does not know its meaning. When the former British Cabinet Minister Roy Jenkins pronounces every 'r' as if it is a 'w', we don't imagine that he has any difficulty in reading, spelling, or understanding the words concerned. We assume that both these people have understood that the way they speak, and what we write and see in print are not at all the same. Why not help the students to see this?

The Implications for Phonics

You will have noticed towards the end of the list of Creole Pronunciation patterns, that some forms of Caribbean Creole English do not utilise vowel sounds in the way that classic phonic teaching techniques require. For example, where the phonic method identifies a short 'o' sound as in "pot", Jamaican Creole English has a variety of "a" sound and produces something like "pat". Some students will invariably use Creole Pronunciation patterns. Tutors must be alert to this and be prepared to abandon phonics. An attempt to persist with phonics in these circumstances will mean that the teaching will degenerate into an extended elocution lesson. The resulting experience will be demoralising, embarrassing, and frustrating for both tutor and student.

A Note on Reading

This booklet is primarily concerned with Caribbean Creole English as it relates to the written form of Standard English. However, one question about reading and Creole English needs to be answered:—

"When should tutors stop and correct a student during reading?"

Suppose, for instance, that the book that the student is reading has printed "I looked up and saw three men", and the student reads out "I look up and see tri men". Should the student be

stopped and made to read it again? The really important question to ask is whether or not the way that the student reads the sentence seriously impairs his understanding of it. In the example used here the student clearly understands what he has read and the meaning has not been distorted by his way of reading it, so he or she should be allowed to continue reading uninterrupted.

Unfortunately, the literacy tutor who has gained information about Caribbean Creole English and wishes to deal with it directly, faces a further complication. This is the problem posed by the student's attitude to Creole.

Chapter Four
Student Attitudes to Caribbean Creole English

Many West Indian adults in Literacy Schemes have a negative attitude towards their Creole English so that if an insensitive tutor attempts to talk about it, they may well react in one of two ways.

1. They may deny that they know the language at all.

   or

2. They may describe it as "bad talk", "bad English" or "broken English" and insist that they have come to the literacy scheme to learn "proper English".

These reactions cannot be dismissed as being silly. They are based on genuine, deeply-rooted historical reasons which still have echoes today. Consider, first of all, the following two pronouncements on Creole English made by British people in Jamaica in the late 18th and early 19th centuries:—

- "*The language of the Creoles is bad English larded with the Guiney dialect, owing to their adopting the African words, in order to make themselves understood by the imported slaves; which they find much easier than teaching these strangers to learn English. The better sort are very fond of improving their language by catching at any hard word that the whites happen to let fall in their hearing; and they alter and misapply it in a strange manner; but a tolerable collection of them gives an air of knowledge and importance in the eyes of their brethren which tickles their vanity and makes them more assiduous in stocking themselves with this unintelligible jargon.*"

  (Edward Long: HISTORY OF JAMAICA London 1774).

☐ **"April 24th 1802** *The Creole Language is not confined to the Negroes. Many of the ladies, who have been educated in England, speak a sort of broken English, with an indolent drawling out of their words that is very tiresome if not disgusting."*

(LADY NUGENT'S JOURNAL, West India Committee 1907)

These views were expressed at a time when the slave trade was still continuing.

Official attitudes to Creole English during colonial times after slavery are exemplified by the quotations in the earlier chapter on Creole pronunciation patterns. The effect of the official attitude was noticed by creole linguists in the Caribbean in the 1950's when they conducted a linguistic survey:—

"The answer to the first question brought out at once what is obviously going to be an important factor in our survey, that is, the emotional reaction of many West Indians to any suggestion that the speech of their colony is not Standard English . . . the element of despair aroused in some West Indians by what they felt to be the "bad" English spoken all around them, was difficult to eliminate from the answer."

(R. B. Le Page — THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM OF THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN. Caribbean Quarterly Vol. 4. No. 1. 1955).

When West Indians came to Britain the attitudes to Creole English that they encountered were bewildering. Most books written in the 1950's and early 1960's about West Indian immigration to Britain described West Indians in detail and examined every aspect of their new lives in Britain. Language, however, was rarely mentioned. Where language was mentioned, the issue of Caribbean Creole English was played down, or ignored. The following comment was typical:—

"Most important, there is of course no language barrier. Thus the great difficulty which teachers and pupils have initially with some other immigrants — from Europe and from Asia — does not exist in their relations with West Indians."

(Ruth Glass — NEWCOMERS: The West Indians in London)

On the other hand, language was often used by employers as their reason for not employing black workers. Dilip Hiro in his book "Black British, White British" quoted an Observer newspaper article of July 1968:—

> *"In the summer of 1968, the vast city centre of Wolverhampton, for instance, did not have a single coloured shop assistant. The explanations given by large stores as well as small shops were 'There just weren't any vacancies' and 'The coloured community, in any case, couldn't speak English well enough."*

Since the days when the former British Caribbean colonies began to gain their Independence, the status of Creole English in the Caribbean has increased steadily. Nevertheless it is still the object of intense controversy. For instance, a fierce debate took place in the Trinidadian press in 1975 and 1976 over efforts to recognise the importance of Creole English in the education system. One writer described Trinidadian Creole English as "Trini-Degenerative English" (Trinidad Guardian 4th February 1976). This was by no means the only negative statement during the debate—

> *"What, if not broken English, is this dialect? . . . I feel that such discussions should be banned from our news media as being a most damaging and indefensible retrograde exercise."*
>
> (Letter to TRINIDAD GUARDIAN 14th October 1975)

or again—

> *". . . our vernacular is confidently and boldly claimed . . . to be a total language having phonology, morphology and syntax! A conclusion . . . based on premises at once so flimsy or so sterile as scarcely to merit serious consideration . . . I contest strongly the claim that what the child speaks in his home is not English but the vernacular. In my view it is a form of English but very bad English . . . The main point of the syllabus is to encourage the child to wallow in the incorrectness and sloppiness of the vernacular."*
>
> (Letter to TRINIDAD GUARDIAN 28th December 1975).

The material contained in this chapter makes it quite clear that literacy tutors who wish to raise the question of Creole English with students must do so with great sensitivity if their efforts are not to prove counter-productive. Despite this need for caution, it is still possible for tutors to deal directly with Creole.

Chapter Five
Dealing Directly with Creole

How can a tutor who fears an adverse reaction, broach the subject of Creole English with West Indian students? One method is to introduce Creole within the context of discussing and looking at examples of other forms of English. Here is a weekly cartoon strip featured in the Scottish Sunday Mail newspaper.

SUNDAY MAIL, May 22, 1977

Scotland's two top funny men join the Royal tour

The Big Yin
ZATNO HER OWER THEER
WHO?
RA KAISER
HOWZIT AJAH HEAR.. AW'S TAE SEE YE AGAIN.. LORRYIZ EAJOY'N YRSELZ!
Ahim knackered ayredeem aboot chalon beans on pawties
ENGLAND
ACH GALOOY GREEZA BREK IT'S NICE TAE BE NICE, AN THEY PAY YE WELL
...AN HORUS THINGS GALIN WI YOU CHOOKY?
AHJM BURSTIN!
DIDNYE SEE RA GLEROA STRIP FUR RA ROYAL GEMME
EVERYWHERR AH GO AH HER, AN RA LAWYY SIGNS UR COVERED UP AN AH CAN NEVER FIND WAN
AYE.. BLUE AN GREEN SHIRTS AN YELLOW TROOSERS WI BLACK AN WHITE SOAX....
AN ENGLAND WOSE WHITE SHIRTS WI SLAV-CLOGGES
AH DIDNY ENJOY RA GEMME
HUDYUZ A NICE TIME ATRA ROYAL SHOW!
SORRY HEID
CMOAN WELL... WITYE FUR HEAN
AHLL WUFTY CO ...MA OBJECTS... AH MEAN, MA SUBJECTS UR AN WATTIN
GEEL WAVE!
WAVE!
WAVE!

Alternatively, this is an extract from a booklet entitled "Rhyming Cockney Slang".

Lark *(joke)*	Bushey Park	**Nails**	Monkey's Tails
Later	Alligator	**Nark**	Noah's Ark
Legs	Scotch Pegs	**Neck**	Bushel and Peck
Liar	Holy Friar	**Nose**	I suppose
Liver	Cheerful Giver		
Lodger	Artful Dodger		
Look	Butcher's Hook	**Old Man** *(husband)*	Old Pot and Pan
Lunch	Kidney Punch	**On the Labour**	Beggar My Neighbour
Magistrate	Garden Gate	**Paper** *(newspaper)*	Linen Draper
Married	Cash and Carried Cut and Carried	**Park**	Noah's Ark
Matches	Cuts and Scratches	**Penny**	Abergavenny
Mate	China Plate	**Phone**	Dog and Bone Molly Malone
Minute *(time)*	Cock Linnet	**Piano**	Joanna
Miss *(a girl)*	Cuddle and Kiss	**Pickle** *(plight)*	Harvey Nichol
Money	Bees and Honey	**Pickles**	Harvey Nichols
Mormon	Jerry O'Gorman	**Piddle**	Jimmy Riddle
Mouth	North and South		

G	**Garden Gate**	Magistrate
	Gay and Frisky	Whisky
	German Bands	Hands *Me Germans are cold*
	Ginger Beer	Engineer
	Ginger Beer	Queer *'e's a bit ginger*
	Glasgow Rangers	Strangers
	God Forbids	Kids *They're noisy godfors*
	Goose's Neck	Cheque *I'll write you a goose's*
	Gordon and Gotch	Watch
	Grasshopper	Copper
	Greengages	Wages *I'll pay you back when I get me greens*
H	**Hampstead Heath**	Teeth *Like me new 'ampsteads/'amps?*
	Hampton Wick	Prick — penis *'e gets on me wick*
	Harry Randall	Candle
	Harvey Nichol	Pickle — plight
	Harvey Nichols	Pickles
	Hearts of Oak	Broke *Lend 'im a quid — 'e's 'arts*
	Hit and Miss	Piss/Kiss
	Holy Friar	Liar

Keep yer minces off 'er Barnet/Bristols/Chalk Farms/Scotches

Many tutors will themselves be speakers of a regional English dialect or will know of one from their home area. This knowledge could be used to show students that most people have access to forms of English which are different from Standard English. Comparisons could be made in terms of vocabulary, catch-phrases, and pronunciation. Where students are being taught in a group they can be encouraged to compare the different forms of English used in each of their communities. For instance, a group with Jamaican, Irish, and London-born students would be able to compare wide varieties of English. In this atmosphere West Indian students are less likely to feel that their Creole English is being singled out as an "exotic curiosity". At the same time the students will become more aware of the contrast between written Standard English and other varieties of English.

In a previous chapter, the possibility of encouraging some students to read and write Creole English was mentioned. **In the majority of cases West Indian students will not be willing to do this. If this is so their wishes must be respected.** However, there will be students who respond favourably to the idea. But they face the difficulty that Creole English has been an oral language rather than a written one. As yet, no definitive written form exists. Students who wish to gain familiarity with the different ways in which Creole English has been written, can be encouraged in three areas.

1. Poetry

Many poets have utilised Caribbean Creole English in their work. Here are just two examples:—

YOUT SCENE

1. last satdey
   I neva dey pan no faam,
   so I decide fe tek a walk
   doun a BRIXTON,
   an see wha gwane.

2. de bredrin dem stan-up
outside a HIP CITY,
as usual, a look pretty;
dem a laaf big laaf
dem a talk dread talk
dem a shuv an shuffle dem feet,
soaking in de sweet MUSICAL BEAT.

3. but when nite come
policeman run dem dung;
beat dem dung a grung,
kick dem ass,
sen dem pass justice
to prison walls of gloom.

4. but de bredda dem a scank;
dem naw rab bank;
is packit dem a pick
an is woman dem a lick
an is run dem a run when de WICKED come.

(LINTON KWESI JOHNSON)
(DREAD BEAT AND BLOOD)
(Bogle L'Ouverture Publications).

LOVE LETTA

(A Jamaican man writes a letter to a girl whom he wants to impress).

Me darlin Love, me lickle Dove,
Me dumplin, me gizada,
Me Sweety Sue, I goes for you
Like how flies goes for sugar.

As ah puts me pen to paper
An me pen nib start to fly,
Me remembrance remember
De fus day you ketch me y'eye.

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You did just come off o' tram-car,
A bus was to you right,
A car swips pass you lef-arise
An you stan up stiff wid fright!

You jaw drop, you mout open,
Jus like wen jackass start yawn,
Me heart go boogoo-boogoo
An ah know wha meck ah born!

Noh scorn me lickle letter love,
Noh laugh after me yaw,
Me larnin not too good, but wat
Me kean spell, me wi draw!

De ting eena de corner wid
De freckles is me heart,
An de plate o' yam an saltfish mean
Dat we can never part.

See how me draw de two face dem
Dah-look pon one anada
Well one is you an one is me,
Teck anyone you rada!

Is not a cockroach foot dis, is
A finger wid a ring,
An it mean ah want to married you
Dis line is piece o' string.

Teck it put roun de wedden-finger
A you wedden-han,
Careful to get de right size, an
Den gi it to dis man.

De man is me. Now sweet-rice,
Keep swell til ah see you nex'
Accep me young heart while ah close
Wid love an bans o' X.

LOUISE BENNETT from JAMAICA LABRISH
(Published by Sangsters)

You will find a much wider selection at the end of this chapter. Some students may be interested in reading this poetry. A smaller number of students might be motivated to attempt to write their own poetry using Creole English.

2. Literature

Creole English also features in published prose. It is always difficult to extract short pieces from prose writing without creating distortion or misinterpreting the mood of the work. However, here are two examples of writing which uses Creole English.

1. "*He see a test come and take a newspaper and put down the money on a box — nobody there to watch the fellar and yet he put the money down. What sort of thing is that? Galahad wonder, they not afraid somebody thief the money?*

   He bounce up against a woman coming out the station but she pass him like a full trolley before he could say sorry. Everybody doing something or going somewhere, is only he who walking stupid.

   On top of that, is one of those winter mornings when a kind of fog hovering around. The sun shining, but Galahad never see the sun look like how it looking now. No heat from it, it just there in the sky like a force-ripe orange. When he look up, the colour of the sky so desolate it make him more frighten. It have a kind of melancholy aspect about the morning that making him shiver. He have a feeling is about seven o'clock in the evening: when he look at a clock on top a building he see is only half-past ten in the morning."

(Samuel Selvon — THE LONELY LONDONERS)

2. " 'Many a time I have seen him savin' the side,' the tailor was saying, as he sat and sewed in his shop. 'You remember that tourney wid Brandon? What-he-name now . . . that big-able water policeman . . . de one in charge o' the Harbour Patrol . . .'

'You mean Hop-a-long Cass? Is because a cow given he mother a kick before he did born that he foot come out so.'

'I know. But is not what I talkin' about. Ol' Hoppy was bowlin' that day as if he was Hurricane father. Lambert went in, playin' he know all about it as us'al, as swoosh! There he go fannin' outside the off-stump an' is click! He snick de ball straight in de slips.' "

['Cricket' by Edward Brathwaite from CARIBBEAN PROSE
Edited by Andrew Salkey]

Many students will become more motivated to read when they become aware of the literature that exists, and just as with the poetry, a few students will, in their turn, attempt their own writing using Creole English. If a student shows an interest in writing in this way, the tutor could suggest the writing of dialogue as a starting point.

The tutor could describe a situation, then ask the student to write the dialogue which would pass between the characters involved. For example:—

CHARACTERS:	Mother Father Teenage Daughter
SITUATION:	Daughter comes downstairs wearing clothes of which the parents do not approve. She announces that she is going out to a late night party. She hasn't done her homework.
STUDENT TASK:	Write down what each person would say in this situation.

Finally, here is a short list of sources which may help tutors to pursue the kinds of approach outlined in this chapter.

Poetry

Louise Bennett — *Jamaica Labrish* (Sangster 1966)
Edward Brathwaite — *The Arrivants* (O.U.P. 1973)
Edward Brathwaite — *Mother Poem* (O.U.P. 1977)
Linton K. Johnson — *Dread, Beat & Blood* (Bogle L'Ouverture Publications 1975)
Kenneth Ramchand & Cecil Gray (Eds) — *West Indian Poetry* (Longman 1971)
L.P. Record: Linton K. Johnson — *Dread, Beat & Blood* (Virgin Records)
L.P. Record: Linton K. Johnson — *Forces of Victory* (Island Records)

Literature

Timothy Callender — *It So Happen* (C.J.L. Belfast 1975)
Jan Carew — *Black Midas* (Longman 1969)
N & U Giuseppi — *Backfire* (Macmillan 1973)
Roy A. K. Heath — *A Man Come Home* (Longman 1974)
C. Herbert — *Melting Pot* (I.L.E.A. English Teaching Service)
Harold S. Ladoo — *No Pain Like This Body* (Anansi Press, Canada 1972)
George Lamming — *In The Castle of My Skin* (Michael Joseph 1953)
Roger Mais — *Brother Man* (Heinemann 1974)
V. S. Naipaul — *The Mystic Masseur* (Heinemann 1971)
Errol O'Connor — *Jamaica Child* (I.L.E.A. English Teaching Service 1978)
H. Orlando Patterson — *The Children of Sisyphus* (Bolivar Press, Jamaica 1974)
Kenneth Ramchand (Ed) — *West Indian Narrative* (Nelson 1966)
V. S. Reid — *New Day* (Heinemann 1973)
Andrew Salkey — *Anancy's Score* (Bogle L'Ouverture Publications 1973)
Andrew Salkey — *A Quality of Violence* (New Beacon 1978)
Andrew Salkey — *Caribbean Prose* (Evans 1967)
Samuel Selvon — *A Brighter Sun* (Longman 1971 & 1979)

Samuel Selvon — *Moses Ascending* (Davis-Poynter 1975)
Samuel Selvon — *The Lonely Londoners* (Longman 1972 & 1979)
Samuel Selvon — *Ways of Sunlight* (Longman 1979)
Inez M. Sibley — *Quashie's Reflections in Jamaican Creole* (Bolivar Press)
Lorna V. Williams — *Jamaica Mento* (P.A.L. 1978)

Bookshops Specialising in Caribbean Literature

New Beacon Books
76 Stroud Green Road
LONDON N4
Tel. No. 01-272 4889

Bogle L'Ouverture Bookshop
5A Chignell Place
Ealing
LONDON W13
Tel. No. 01-579 4920

Grass Roots
61 Golborne Road
LONDON W10
Tel. No. 01-969 0687

Headstart Bookshop
25 West Green Road
LONDON N15
Tel. No. 01-802 2838

Sabarr Books
121 Railton Road
LONDON SE24
Tel. No. 01-274 6785

Harriet Tubman Bookshop
27 Grove Lane
Handsworth
BIRMINGHAM B21 9ES
Tel. No. 021-554 8419

Grassroots Bookshop
1 Newton Street
MANCHESTER M1 1HW
Tel. No. 061-236 3112

Shanti Third World Centre
Waterloo Place
178 Oxford Road
MANCHESTER 13
Tel. No. 061-273 5111

Ujaama
180 Chorlton Road
Brook's Bar
MANCHESTER 16
Tel. No. 061-226 4840

Varieties of English

American English/English American (Abson Books, Bristol)
Rhyming Cockney Slang/Cockney-English/English-Cockney (Abson Books, Bristol)
Scottish English/English Scottish (Abson, Books, Bristol)

Frank Collymore — *Barbadian Dialect* (Barbados National Trust 1955)
Julian Franklyn — *A Dictionary of Rhyming Slang* (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1975)
McCormick — *Bring on the Big Yin* (Collins 1977)
R. Ottley — *Creole Talk of Trinidad and Tobago*
Eric Partridge — *Smaller Slang Dictionary* (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1976)
L.P. Record: *English with a Dialect* (B.B.C. Records)

Conclusion

This booklet has been written for adult literacy tutors in Britain who are teaching West Indian students. It is hoped that tutors who read it will enhance their understanding of Creole English. They might also be able to increase the effectiveness of their teaching by avoiding some of the more damaging pitfalls which can occur in the course of teaching literacy skills to West Indian adults. Obviously, there are West Indian students to whom parts of the booklet do not apply. Equally, there are new developments all the time, such as the assertion of the validity and importance of Creole English by the youth of the West Indian Community in Britain; or the way in which Creole English is changing under the impact of British urban life.

Many people would disagree with the approach taken in this booklet and particularly with some of the suggestions in the last chapter. However, the experience of educationists in the Caribbean is worth noting:—

> *" 'At G.C.E. level, for instance, the failure rate in English for the region as a whole fluctuates between 70 per cent and 80 per cent' (This, among those already selected as being the top 10%) . . . the very similarities between English and West Indian Creole complicates matters. The pupil does not know the difference between the two, and it is difficult to motivate him to perceive it, let alone to keep the two apart. When his teacher too is subject to the confusion the position becomes hopeless."*
>
> (Foreword by R. N. Murray — in Dennis Craig — AN EXPERIMENT IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE CARIBBEAN).

Ignoring Creole or attempting to eradicate it will not lead the vast majority of students to full proficiency in written Standard English.

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